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CHECKBOOK MAY HAVE SAVED V CORPS SERGEANT FROM DEATH IN IRAQ CONVOY ATTACK

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SCHWEINFURT, Germany -- Sgt. Arthur Coleman III lived to tell his tale. Had it not been for the people who entered his life since Easter Sunday 2004, the ending might have been a lot different.

On April 11, 2004, Coleman called his wife Tramika to say he loved her after he was tasked to go on a mission as part of V Corps' 1st Battalion, 77th Armor, 1st Infantry Division.

"This particular route we were taking was called 'Purple Heart Alley,' or MSR Tampa, the military name for it. Normal day, a little warm, got all my gear on, weapon outside, I'm looking at the countryside. It's a really nice day, because Iraq's a beautiful country outside the city," Coleman said.



ROGER TEEL

Sgt. Arthur Coleman III receives the Purple Heart award he earned while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with V Corps' Task Force 1st Battalion, 77th Armor, from corps Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Daniel Keefe.

His life changed at 3:30 p.m., when the convoy got hit by an explosion followed by rampant gunfire. Coleman's side of the HEMMT cargo truck got pounded, and he was hit all over. He crawled out of the driver's side of the truck.

Enter Spc. Blair Boyette, Coleman's driver.

"I told him I ain't gonna make it. He said, 'It's going to be all right.' I told him to pull security.

He said 'Sgt. Coleman, I'm not going to leave you,'" Coleman said.

Boyette dragged Coleman by his body armor vest to another vehicle, where the sergeant was loaded onto an old mattress and into the truck.

Sgt. 1st Class James Tinton, the senior NCO for the unit's combat medics, started bandaging Coleman together, aided by Boyette. His decision not to cut circulation to Coleman's damaged arm ended up saving the limb.

"He thought they could save it, so I really thank him for that," Coleman said.

Coleman's truck was the only one hit in the convoy, and he was the only one injured. He later discovered that the Bank of America checkbook in his back pocket acted as a buffer for a bullet that was heading straight for his liver.

After six extensive surgeries in Iraq, Coleman was flown to Landstuhl (Germany) Army Medical Center, and later to the U.S. Army Hospital in Wuerzburg, Germany, to

complete the skin graft that would save his arm from amputation. He was one of the first injured Soldiers to be housed at the hospital's medical/surgical ward.

The name of that ward changed to "Victory Ward" when Coleman, together with Brig. Gen. Daniel Keefe, V Corps chief of staff, dedicated it to the Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division April 28. Keefe also awarded Coleman a Purple Heart in the ward, with the sergeant surrounded by his family.

"I'm blessed beyond blessed," Coleman said.

